

*poem for an interfaith Vigil for the Mountains and People of Appalachia, in observance of International Climate Action Day, Thomas Jefferson Memorial Church—Unitarian-Universalist, October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2009*

## **Keeping Vigil**

There is no prosthetic for this.  
What would we have them do?  
Inflate the scars with some new horror,  
gouge the mountains' sides and pump in plastic?

There is cancer gnawing at the Appalachian mountaintops,  
shoveling down its black and bottomless throat their voiceless  
animals and plants, clear water, and the hopes of generations  
who would like a chance to make their songs and warmth  
from sun and wind, to earn their peace and safety  
in some other way than slithering through  
a mountain's cells and breathing in  
its toxic dust.

Just a chance.  
A chance against coal,  
against metastasis.

So should we give it to them?  
To the future's faces we won't see?

There is always a reason  
to leave on our lights, to overlook  
a simple switch as we leave a room, to let our  
computers hum comfortingly while we sleep,  
and more machines besides that save us just  
a little bit of effort, a little bit of time  
we'll never use for walking  
on those mountains now.  
It could be a reason like this:  
*there are more where they came from.*

Plenty of mountains.  
Plenty of species.

Plenty of energy.  
This is plenty.  
Isn't it?

We can't put tops back on the mountains  
we have turned our backs upon—face facts.  
So why fuss about their scalping now?  
It's just another choice.

Still, we might choose it.

*We might battle for their beauty now,  
let our hearts be moved by mutilation now,  
notice the grieving of our neighbors now,  
decide for once and all that foul King Coal  
must be deposed, that courage is what  
we need and need is different from desire,  
that earth's rough wonder and wilderness  
are what we will shelter and will celebrate—  
so abundant, frail, and urgent beside  
our transient appetites and ease.*

*We might decide to finally hear the fiddlers' wail  
while our mountaintops are blown efficiently to bits  
in no less a desecration than when the Taliban  
blew Bamyán Buddhas from their mountainsides  
because something was so threatening  
about their great, compassionate faces.*

We might fear compassion, too, as it always  
gives us choice and choice won't keep us  
comfortable.

But tonight we start regardless, and as we sing and shout  
and stand up for our yearning, for this last-ditch rescue  
from calamity, we link our hearts in hopefulness;  
for wherever two or three are gathered,  
*there are plenty, plenty more  
where we came from.*

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